

DATELINE PARKLAND: TRANSMEDIA NEWS AND STUDENT ACTIVISM  
FROM AN AMERICAN MASS SHOOTING  
A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## Abstract

**THESIS:** Dateline Parkland: Transmedia News and Student Activism from an American Mass Shooting

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Media, and technology are ever evolving, and storytelling and journalism are not exceptions to the effects of these constant changes. Among them is the evolution of journalism into a transmedia phenomenon. No longer passive a consumer of news, the public assembles knowledge of news events from multiple sources and perspectives, shares it, and acts on it in ways not seen in the analog age. This study evaluates a sample of the news stories published following the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School in Parkland, Florida, as a snapshot of the wider coverage of the event. Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling served as the lens of analysis for looking at the MSD shooting content. This study demonstrates that, despite any form of centralized planning, coverage of the shooting matched the definition of transmedia storytelling.

*Keywords:* Convergence, Transmedia Storytelling, Journalism, #NeverAgainMSD, Mass Shooting, News, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

On December 14, 2012, a gunman walked into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. He killed 20 children, six adults, and then himself. This mass shooting led to calls to stop such tragedies from happening in the United States (U.S.) ever again using the slogan “never again.” In spite of these efforts, since Sandy Hook there have been nearly 2,000 mass shootings in which four or more people, excluding the shooter, were shot. More than 2,200 people have been killed and nearly 8,200 wounded (Lopez, 2019, para. 2). The post-Sandy Hook calls to end mass shootings have failed. There have been 2,271 mass shootings in the United States since Sandy Hook, according to a Vox article that keeps count and is updated daily (Lopez & Sukumar, 2019, para. 1). In June 2016, a gunman killed 49 people and wounded dozens more at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida (Ellis, Fantz, Karimi, & McLaughlin, 2016, para. 1). In October 2017, a gunman killed 59 people and wounded hundreds at a country music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada (Blankstein, Williams, Elbaum, & Chuck, 2017, para. 1). This pattern — a tragedy followed by calls for change and then silence until the next — has been repeating itself in the U.S. since before the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. On February 14, 2018 that pattern continued with yet another tragedy: the Valentine's Day mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. This school shooting was one of the deadliest in U.S. history. A nineteen-year-old former student opened fire into multiple classrooms with a semi-automatic rifle. Within a matter of minutes his actions left seventeen students and staff members dead and just as many injured (Chuck, Johnson, & Siemaszko, 2018, para. 1–3).

As usual following such a tragedy, the people of the U.S. began debating the state of gun violence, school safety, and lack of help for the mentally ill. But this time something was

different. The school's teen survivors were not satisfied with simply receiving “thoughts and prayers” (Chan, 2016, Harden & Iati, 2019, Jackson, 2016, Otis, 2015, Trifunov, 2012). Within hours of the shooting, a handful of student survivors gave interviews with the media and began to take charge of the direction of their own story. As it does with all major news events, media coverage of the shooting made instant public figures out of a handful of well-spoken students. In addition, they went to one of the tools they knew best: social media. Using the hashtags, #Enough and #NeverAgain, they gained the support of students, policymakers, parents, and celebrities around the world. Their points were read and heard. Some states immediately worked to change state law. In the coming weeks their efforts would transform into a national movement leading to nationwide school walk outs, protests outside of the White House, and even worldwide demonstrations in the March for Our Lives campaign. Examining the breaking news coverage of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSD) shooting and Never Again MSD movement is valuable for understanding modern journalism and storytelling.

This case study will examine a sample of the news stories published following the MSD shooting. To evaluate the transmedia nature of these stories as an example of the wider coverage of the event, Henry Jenkins’ seven principles of transmedia storytelling will serve as my lens of analysis for looking at the MSD shooting content. The seven principles are as follows (Jenkins, 2009a, para. 13–21, 2009b, para. 1–25).

- Spreadability vs. Drillability
- Continuity vs. Multiplicity
- Immersion vs. Extractability
- Worldbuilding
- Seriality

- Subjectivity
- Performance

This study then uses Jenkins' seven principles from a journalistic perspective as the coding categories for a directed qualitative analysis to examine the set of news stories.

Transmedia storytelling is often associated with entertainment narratives, such as movies, books, and YouTube series. Henry Jenkins (2007b, para. 2) defines the term as, "...a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story." A transmedia narrative unfolds across multiple media platforms with each piece adding value to the whole. Unlike earlier work in transmedia storytelling, this event and movement was not initially meant to be transmediated. Rather, the MSD shooting is a "feral" transmedia story (Moloney, 2013). Feral transmedia stories are not orchestrated from the beginning with someone planning out the various events and twists and turns of the narrative, but rather they emerge from the readers' organic interactions with stories that illustrate additive pieces of the storyworld. Despite the lack of planning and direction, these stories form a transmedia narrative.

There is much to be discovered by examining how transmedia storytelling can be implemented into the coverage of an important news event. When the issue is told as a multi-platform story, people have the opportunity to connect and get involved through an array of accessible platforms. When people get more involved in a story, they are more likely to want to do something about it. Based on the literature reviewed, there is a lack of studies that analyze stories that were not pre-planned to be transmedia. All of the current studies that analyze transmedia journalism simply look at projects that were designed as transmedia narratives from

the start (Gambarato, R.R. & Alzamora, G. & Tarcia, L., 2018, Gambarato, 2016, Gambarato, Alzamora, & Tarcia, 2016, Godulla, & Wolf, 2018, Moloney, 2015). This thesis explores transmedia storytelling in relation to unplanned journalism to begin filling the research gap. This research seeks to discover how well Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling apply to an important breaking news story. This study provides insights on the role a spontaneous transmedia story plays within journalism and explores transmedia storytelling principles that might help fuel civic engagement and activism.

The following chapters will review the literature of media convergence and transmedia storytelling, the research methods used, the results, and a discussion of what the collected data reveals about the transmedia storytelling structure of this ongoing story.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Convergence

The rapid changes that have taken place to the media landscape since the arrival of the internet can be summarized in one word, convergence. Sound, images, and text have all converged together in today's world. Media is no longer consumed separately, but rather in various forms of new media like multimedia, crossmedia, and transmedia. In 2001 Jenkins' described the changes that were taking place to the media landscape at the time in MIT's *Technology Review* as the following.

Media convergence is an ongoing process, occurring at various intersections of media technologies, industries, content and audiences; it's not an end state. There will never be one black box controlling all media. Rather, thanks to the proliferation of channels and the increasingly ubiquitous nature of computing and communications, we are entering an era where media will be everywhere, and we will use all kinds of media in relation to one another. We will develop new skills for managing information, new structures for transmitting information across channels, and new creative genres that exploit the potentials of those emerging information structures (Jenkins, 2001, p. 2).

Jenkins' goes on to argue that old media never dies, but rather it's just the technology the media is delivered on that changes. He states, "Recorded sound is a medium. Radio drama is a genre. CDs, MP3 files and eight-track cassettes are delivery technologies. Genres and delivery technologies come and go, but media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment system" (Jenkins, 2001, p.3). A more modern definition of media convergence can be found within the Encyclopedia Britannica, which is defined as the following:

“Phenomenon involving the interconnection of information and communications technologies, computer networks, and media content. It brings together the “three C’s”—computing, communication, and content—and is a direct consequence of the digitization of media content and the popularization of the Internet. Media convergence is the merging of mass communication outlets – print, television, radio, the Internet along with portable and interactive technologies through various digital media platforms” (Flew, 2013).

Media convergence is no longer a new phenomenon, but rather it is a daily reality in 2019 and changes to the media landscape will continue for as long as new digital technologies continue to be developed across the world. In this ever-evolving reality of media convergence, human life has changed significantly since 1990. Not only has the way audiences receive their media changed, but the way audiences now *interact* with media content has been transformed by this phenomenon. Society is now known as having a participatory culture.

### **Participatory Culture**

It can be said with confidence that in 2019 social networking sites like Facebook, microblogging services like Twitter, and content-sharing sites like YouTube dominate the internet and are extremely involved in how audiences receive and interact with media content. All of these sites rely on a culture of wide-scale, online social participation. This active participation is called participatory culture. Henry Jenkins describes participatory culture as one that meets the following criteria:

1. There are relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement.
2. There is strong support for creating and sharing what you create with others.
3. There is some kind of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced gets passed

along to newbies and novices. 4. Members feel that their contributions matter.

5. Members feel some degree of social connection with each other at least to the degree to which they care what other people think about what they have created (Jenkins, 2007a).

Participatory culture emerged because new technology makes it possible for everyday consumers to “archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways” (Jenkins, 2007a). This culture of online participation with media content has led to new modes of communicating, like transmedia storytelling.

### **Transmedia Storytelling**

Transmedia storytelling is often associated with entertainment narratives, such as movies, books, and YouTube series. Henry Jenkins defines the term by writing:

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (Jenkins, 2007b).

When Jenkins first popularized this concept in his 2003 Technology Review column (2003), he stated that a transmedia story “...unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.” Jenkins later added in a pair of blog posts (2009a; 2009b) that a transmedia story tends to abide by the following seven principles: spreadability vs. drillability, continuity vs. multiplicity, immersion vs. extractability, worldbuilding, seriality, subjectivity, and performance.

The first of Jenkins’ (2009a) competing principles is **spreadability** vs. **drillability**. A story implements spreadability when it contains elements that allow the public to actively engage

in the circulation of its media content through social networks, which in turn increases its economic and cultural worth. On the other hand, drillability is when a story uses elements that encourage the audience to dig deeper into the subject on their own beyond that initial story.

The next set of competing principles is **continuity** vs. **multiplicity**. Continuity speaks to the greater overall narrative. If a storyworld has a sense of continuity, then the stories within it will give the audience a sense of coherence. On the opposite end is **multiplicity**. Multiplicity can be simply defined as alternative retellings of the foundational story of the storyworld.

The third set of principles is **immersion** vs. **extractability**. To meet the transmedia goal of immersion the reader must enter into the story's world, resulting in a withdrawal of attention to the world and reality immediately around them. Countering immersion is extractability. This principle requires extractable elements to be available from the story for the reader to take and use in areas of their everyday life. These elements can be physical, philosophical, or behavioral.

Now moving on to the principles Jenkins' classifies as not having juxtaposed partners. **Worldbuilding** is the fourth of Jenkins' principles, and it should enable the audience's desire to map out and learn everything there is to know about the world represented in the story. The fifth of Jenkins' principles is **seriality**. Jenkins (2009b) defines a serial as creating meaningful and compelling episodes, which disperse a full story across multiple segments through the use of multiple types of media and mediums. The sixth of Jenkins' principles is **subjectivity**, which embraces the individual point of view in storytelling. Subjectivity adds complexity and intrigue through the use of different characters and their different views on the same narrative. The seventh, and final, of Jenkins' principles is **performance**. When the performance aspect of transmedia storytelling is implemented, the story will inspire the audience to take action or even

provide actions for them to complete. This allows the audience to make their own contributions to the story.

Transmedia storytelling is not just an adaptation of the same story from one media to another. Transmedia storytelling has several traits, which include: the ability to build content over a variety of media, effectively communicating a story to the audience that will lead them from one medium to the next; and the ability to keep the story alive not just by the thrill of interacting with different devices and platforms, but to inspire the audience enough to seek out the story among each of the various media (Jenkins 2007b, Gambarato, 2013, Moloney, 2011).

Transmedia storytelling can also be grouped into two main categories. The first is called “intracompositional” or “franchise.” This is a “collection of mono-medium stories, all contributing distinct stories to one overarching story- world.” This collection of stories can exist as a book, a film, and a video game, all within the same franchise. One of the largest and most well-known examples of franchise transmedia is *The Matrix* by the Wachowski brothers. It was a transmedia story, because between each major film, additional content (like graphic novels, animations, video games and memorabilia) was released to give the audience a better understanding of the story world and to keep fans engaged (Gambarato, 2013). The second type is “portmanteau” or a group of media that tells one story. An example of this could be an entertainment series that takes place on TV and online at the same time (Gambarato, 2013, Dena, 2011). Robert Pratten also adds in a third category called the complex transmedia experience, which can be described as “a hybrid produced by the interaction of the previous two types” (Gambarato, 2013, Pratten, 2011/2015).

## **Changes in Journalism**

At the intersection of convergence and storytelling lies journalism. Russell (2011) points out that the twenty-year period from 1990 to 2010 was a transformative era in the history of media. The most obvious and important changes in the news media landscape during those years were the adoption of the internet, the increase of low-cost digital tools, and the omnipresence of digital networks. Prior to the internet, the concept of ‘mass media’ ruled journalism. Russell defines mass media as “the predominance of commercial and professional news product and a one-way communication model catering to a national community” (p. 3). During this time, journalists did not have to fight so hard for the audience’s attention. Professional journalists would publish their stories and the general public would flock to them. There was a take it or leave it mentality, and the public was taking it. Since the explosion of the internet, the ways people are using technology to find, create, organize, present, and circulate news have changed and expanded. Journalism is no longer under the mass media model, but it has changed to what Russell calls ‘networked journalism’ or “journalism that sees publics acting as creators, investigators, reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors of news and where all variety of media, amateurs and professional, corporate and independent products and interests intersect at a new level” (p. 1). Journalism has expanded beyond just the efforts of the traditional news reporter. Modern journalism now comes in many alternative forms. Russell describes what journalism means in today’s world:

Journalism here refers to the wealth of news-related information, opinion, and cultural expression, in various styles and from various producers, which together shape the meaning of news event and issue. Journalism has extended far beyond stories created for television broadcast outlets or for publication in traditional commercial newspapers and

magazines. Journalism can be a conversation that takes place in the blogosphere; an interactive media-rich interface on a mainstream or alternative news site that provides context to a breaking story; the work of any number of fact-check sites; a tweeted cameraphone photo of a breaking news event; a comment or comment thread on a news site; a videogame created to convey a particular news narrative, and so on. (p. 30).

Journalist Jeff Jarvis (2006) writes, "...the public can get involved in a story before it is reported, contributing facts, questions, and suggestions. The journalists can rely on the public to help report the story" (para.4). This demonstrates the shift in the relationship between journalism professionals and the public. The public is now able to be a source to journalists through digital technology, which in turn has created "a shift in the balance of power between news providers and news consumers" (Russell, 2011, p. 2)

Contemporary journalism has to work for the audience's attention as it competes against entertainment, social media, and the thousands of other messages the audience is flooded with on a daily basis. Moloney describes this new way of getting the audiences' attention as:

To reach the public with a story we journalists see as important or compelling means that we must find the public where it already dwells. There we must engage readers so that they are more likely to pay attention to the story, share it, interact with it, contribute to it and understand its complexities. Ideally, like the fans of *Lost*, they may be so engaged that they take the story into their lives and seek out more informational depth on their own (Moloney, 2011, p. 94).

Since the beginning of digital convergence, journalism has had to constantly be shifting its delivery methods in order to gain and keep the audience's attention. This means the ways

journalists tell stories has to stay current with the ways modern audiences want to consume stories.

### **Transmedia Journalism**

Transmedia journalism is taking the suggestions and principles of transmedia storytelling and intertwining them into journalism. Transmedia journalism is executed by designing a news project to report a story by unfolding across multiple media in an expansive rather than repetitive way (Moloney, 2012, 2015; Gambarato & Alzamora, 2018). For example, in the entertainment industries the bulk of a transmedia story may be told through a film, but a series of interconnected stories may additionally be told through games, comics, novels, online, and fan created works. All of those added pieces expand rather than repeat the story. Transmedia journalism can also follow this sprawling project design for storytelling. An example of a transmedia journalism story is the National Geographic Society's (NGS) Future of Food project. Moloney (2015) explains how the Future of Food project qualifies as transmedia journalism below.

The Society produced stories using traditional media forms such as photography, text, video and illustration as well as nontraditional journalism forms like guided travel, a museum exhibit, hackathon, forum, lecture series, games, quizzes and tastings. These stories were published across a variety of the Society's available media channels, through which one can assume they reached more diverse publics than any one of those channels could alone. Story content contributed to a complex storyworld on food, agriculture, sustainability and the environment, among other topics. The subjects of those stories only very rarely repeated themselves directly (Moloney, 2015, p.145).



As of 2019, the literature on transmedia journalism has been focused solely on transmedia narratives that have been pre-planned and designed out in the journalism world. This has left a gap in the research. This thesis aims to explore the presence of transmedia storytelling as an organic part of journalism without having been planned out from the start within the project design.

### **The Never Again MSD Storyworld**

In an effort to study this relatively untouched intersection of transmedia storytelling and journalism I aim to examine a piece of the Never Again MSD narrative through the lens of Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling. The Never Again MSD movement began with a group of school shooting survivors. The Parkland survivors are a group of students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) high school where a mass shooting took place on February 14, 2018 that killed 17 people, both students and teachers. Some of the most well-known faces of these survivors include Jaclyn Corin, Alex Wind, Emma Gonzalez, Cameron Kasky and David Hogg. *NBC News* reporter Newcomb describes the teens as:

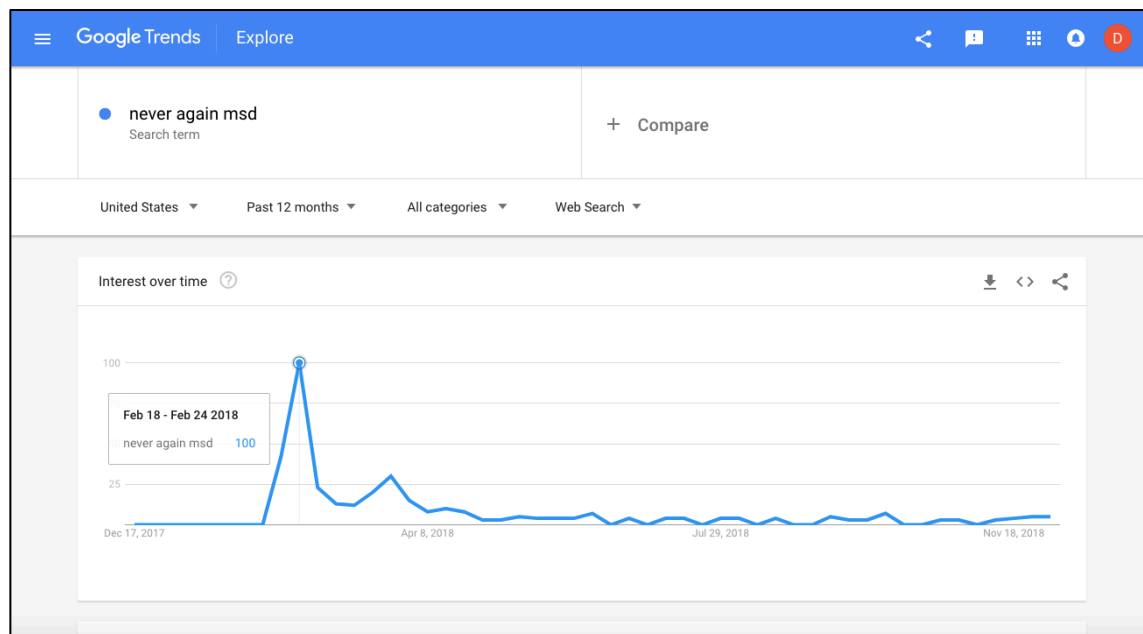
Articulate, witty and digitally native, the survivors of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, are using social media to debunk conspiracy theories and amplify their voices in a way the world hasn't seen before. With thoughtful tweets about gun control, a fearlessness for taking on politicians and sharply worded messages to shut down conspiracy theorists, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School are leading a movement. And in classic teenager fashion, they're doing it their way (Newcomb, 2018).

Newcomb went on to say that the conversation after mass shootings has followed a familiar pattern in the U.S. of “anger, sadness, grief, calls for gun control and then, the inevitable silence

until the next tragedy.” This time experts are saying it may be different as people are actually “listening, liking, retweeting and responding to students' messages” (Newcomb, 2018). The Never Again MSD narrative is an incredibly strong one that warrants a closer look. With strong characters, many storylines, and ample attention from audiences Never Again MSD was arguably on the fast track to becoming a transmedia story. In efforts to confirm this hypothesis this study took Jenkins’ seven principles, split them up into ten individual principles, and then examined the journalistic coverage of the Never Again MSD through the lens of those principles.

### Chapter 3: Methods

This research seeks to discover how well Henry Jenkins' seven principles of transmedia storytelling apply to an important breaking news story. A qualitative content analysis was conducted in order to answer this research question. To begin, the study's focus was narrowed down to the peak week of interest within the MSD shooting and Never Again MSD movement. This peak week was determined through the use of Google Trends. Google Trends is a feature that shows how frequently a term is entered into Google's search engine relative to the site's total search volume over a given period of time ("Google Trends: What Is Google Trends?," n.d.). The phrase "Never Again MSD" was entered into Google Trends and a graph was returned from the search. The Google Trends graph can be seen below in figure 1.



***Figure 1. The Google Trends graph showing the peak week of interest in the “Never Again MSD” campaign as the week of Feb. 18-24, 2018, which was the week following the shooting.***

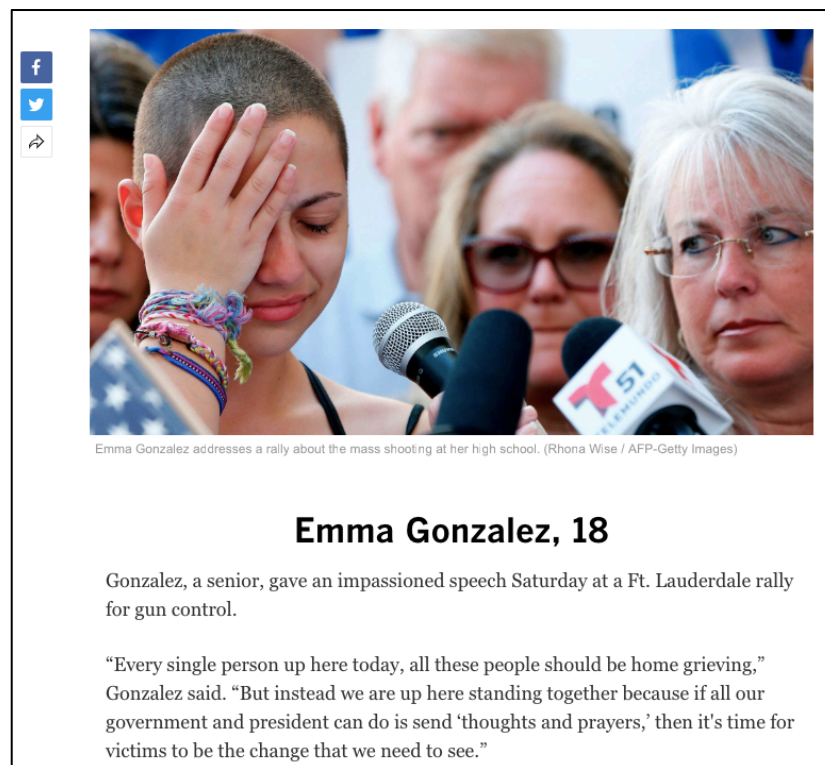
The week following the shooting, February 18-24, 2018, was the peak week of public interest in the MSD shooting/Never Again MSD movement. The Google News feature was then used to

search for all stories related to “never again msd” between February 18-24, 2018. Every news story that came up from this search, excluding a few erroneous articles that had turned up and had no relevance to the MSD shooting, was collected. In total 108 news articles were gathered for the analysis. The underlying method of the analysis was a slightly adapted method of a directed qualitative content analysis. A content analysis with a directed approach is a type of content analysis that aims to “validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2016). This method allows researchers to begin the analysis by identifying key concepts as initial coding categories using the existing theory (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). That is exactly what was done for this study using Jenkins’ seven principles of transmedia storytelling. Each of the paired principles were split up resulting in a total of ten transmedia storytelling principles, which became the ten categories for analysis. Definitions were then created for each category using previous research on Jenkins’ principles. The category definitions are described in detail later in this chapter.

The news stories were then analyzed using Henry Jenkins ten principles of transmedia storytelling. The ten principles are as follows: spreadability, drillability, continuity, multiplicity, immersion, extractability, worldbuilding, seriality, subjectivity, and performance (Jenkins, 2009a 2009b). The use of Jenkins’ principles as a framework has been done before in other studies. Lam and Tegelberg (2019) analyzed how the Extreme Ice Survey (EIS) becomes a transmedia narrative of climate change through the use of multiple media to gather and deliver climate change information using the principles as their lens of analysis. They argue that “the combination of photographic evidence with transmedia storytelling offers an effective approach for future scientific and environmental communication” (Lam & Tegelberg, 2019, p. 1). This study, however, uses a modification of Jenkins’ principles to better fit the journalistic purpose

under study. In order to have a deeper understanding of the coding process it is important to have an understanding of how the stories were read and interpreted as having the ten principles apply.

The first of Jenkins' (2009a) principles is **spreadability**. He defines this principle as, "the capacity of the public to engage actively in the circulation of media content through social networks and in the process expand its economic value and cultural worth" (para. 14). Stories are spread through fan interaction. For a story to be categorized as spreadable it needs readily available buttons to share stories and links to social media. The content of the story also needs to be quotable and easily redistributed by the audience to other areas of the internet. Spreadable stories also tend to require short-term engagement before quickly being shared. Finally, the content also needs to be relevant to multiple audiences (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).



*Figure 3. Screenshot from the story "These are the Florida students behind the movement to end gun violence" published by the LA Times demonstrating a spreadable online story structure (Kaleem & Agrawal, 2018).*


“These are the Florida students behind the movement to end gun violence” published by the *Los Angeles Times* qualifies as spreadable because it can easily be shared throughout the internet.

The story consists of 11 short profiles of the most prominent Parkland students who are leading the Never Again MSD movement. The content is broken down into easily digestible and quotable chunks. The reader can then quickly share a quote, a paragraph, or a photo from this article.

The second of Jenkin’s principles is **drillability**. Drillability can be described as when a story encourages its viewers to dig deeper into the subject on their own. Stories were considered drillable if they drew viewers into the storyworld and enticed them to try to discover less obvious details beneath the surface of each story. If a story is drillable it truly captures the audience’s interest and imagination. From a journalistic standpoint having drillable content actually allows the reader to take on the role of the reporter, seeking out more information for themselves (Moloney, 2011, p. 68). In order to be drillable, the article would need to present options for viewers to seek out information it does not provide. These options can be as simple as presenting links to outside content, references to documents or court cases, or even other stories that readers might choose to explore on their own. “‘Never again’: Grieving students push for change to prevent another school shooting” published by the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, is an example of this principle.

[\[Popular on SunSentinel.com\] Vocal Parkland parents telling Florida senators: Do not give Scott Israel his job back as sheriff »](#)

The five students responding to the **shootings that killed 17** classmates and teachers at the school on Wednesday were Gonzalez, Cameron Kasky, David Hogg, Alex Wind and Jaclyn Corin.



**#TurnoutTuesday** @Turnout\_Tuesday

Our big announcement is here! **#NeverAgain** will be standing up to the politicians, and marching for every kid: past, present, and future. March 24th, people. **#MarchForOurLives** @AMarch4OurLives [twitter.com/amarch4ourlive...](https://twitter.com/amarch4ourlive...)

**March For Our Lives** @AMarch4OurLives

On March 24 we will take the streets of Washington DC and our communities across the country to **#MarchForOurLives**. Sign up at [marchforourlives.com](https://marchforourlives.com)

**MARCH FOR OUR LIVES**

MARCH 24 IN WASHINGTON, DC AND YOUR COMMUNITY

[MARCHFOROURLIVES.COM](https://MARCHFOROURLIVES.COM)

6,968 10:08 AM · Feb 18, 2018

3,812 people are talking about this

The students have set up social media accounts for a movement they're calling "Never Again." The hashtag for the movement, **#NeverAgain**, has gone viral.

Using the newly created **@NeverAgainMSD** Twitter account, survivors have been getting the word out about the demonstration in Washington, D.C., called the March For Our Lives. The details are being shared on another Twitter account created by the students, **@AMarch4OurLives**.

They've been in contact with organizers of last year's Women's March to plan the trip to Washington.

"We are doing this for the victims, to not let them die in vain," Corin said.

**Figure 4. Screenshot from the story “‘Never again’: Grieving students push for change to prevent another school shooting” published by the South Florida Sun Sentinel, demonstrating a drillable article (Barszewski & Ballou, 2018).**

Figure 4 above shows that the article gives the reader options to seek out additional information about the MSD shooting narrative not specifically provided by the article. For example, at the top there is a blue link to a related story in between the paragraphs of the actual story. There is also a red embedded text link in the actual story and a clickable embedded tweet containing several links on the left-hand side.

The third of Jenkin's principles is **continuity**. If a storyworld has a sense of continuity the stories within it will give the audience a sense of coherence and plausibility. A transmedia story may unfold in distinct lines and across various media, but it should still have a sense of coherence. Within journalism, this can often mean having the same editorial approach and style

to the stories regardless of the media being used (Moloney, 2011, p. 71). In relation to examining Never Again MSD, the stories were considered to have continuity if they were linear and continuous along the lines of the concrete facts of the original MSD shooting story. The shooting story itself is the foundational story of the overall transmedia narrative. Stories where continuity applied are those stories from the first few days following the shooting, which stated where and when the shooting took place and what the students were doing immediately afterwards. “What Is Never Again MSD? Parkland Survivors Are Standing Up To Politicians & The NRA” published by *Bustle*, represents continuity by following closely with the foundational narrative. This can be seen in one of the article’s first paragraphs.

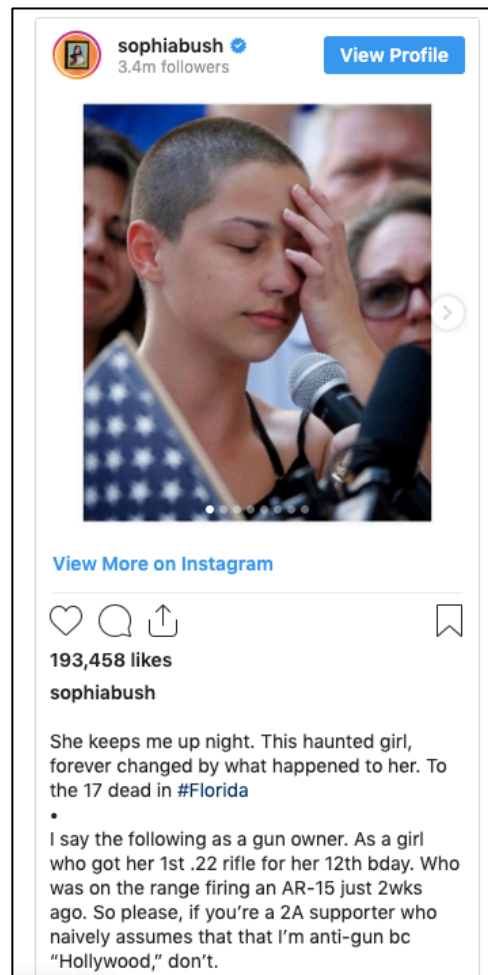
“The whole community — and much of the nation — is still mourning the shooting, but multiple students have banded together to take gun violence prevention into their own hands. Their names are Emma Gonzalez, Cameron Kasky, David Hogg, Alex Wind, Jaclyn Corin, Sofie Whitney, and Delaney Tarr, among others, and they're prepared for a fight. They're calling their movement Never Again, and the "MSD" added at the end of their Twitter account refers to the name of their school” (Seelinger, 2018).

This story is a great example, because it goes back to the basics of first summarizing the school shooting, naming the students, and then explaining the fundamentals of their Never Again MSD efforts. If the narrative began to differ too much from the original story of the school shooting it would then fall under the next transmedia principle.

The fourth of Jenkins’ principles is **multiplicity**. Multiplicity can be simply defined as alternative retellings of the original foundational story of the storyworld. To qualify for this principle the articles had to tell a narrative different from the original foundational MSD shooting story and be told from a varying perspective. A varying perspective can be something



as small as the difference between coverage by the Wall Street Journal and the LA Times, or as radical as between coverage from an NPR reporter and a far-right conspiracy theorist, like Alex Jones. This principle can be seen within the article, “Lauren Jauregui, Zendaya & More Praise Emma Gonzalez For Her Gun Control Speech” published by *justjaredjr.com*.



***Figure 5. Screenshot of Sophia Bush’s Instagram post from the story “Lauren Jauregui, Zendaya & More Praise Emma Gonzalez For Her Gun Control Speech” showing multiplicity (“Lauren Jauregui, Zendaya & More Praise Emma Gonzalez For Her Gun Control Speech | Emma Gonzalez | Just Jared Jr.,” 2018).***

This story features various celebrities retelling the Parkland story from their perspectives, commenting on the issues that the students were talking about, and praising Emma Gonzalez for her speech on gun control.

The fifth of Jenkin's principles is **immersion**. To fulfill this principle the reader must enter into the world of the story, even if it is just briefly, resulting in a departure of attention to the world immediately around them. Immersing the audience deeply enough to forget his or herself is one of the major goals of transmedia storytelling. In order for the MSD news articles to achieve immersion, their narratives had to allow the audience to get a little lost within it. The articles had to enable the reader to picture themselves at the scene and place themselves in the shoes of the subjects. A prime example of immersion is "After witnessing bloodshed, school shooting survivor uses poetry to cope" published by *Local 10 ABC News*. The following excerpt is only a piece of 14-year-old Eden Hebron's full poem published within the article.

"...We were laughing and doing our work, me and my best friend.  
But little did I know that 5 minutes later, her life would come to an end.  
I hear a sound. One. Two. Three. Four. Five.  
Gunshots? That's funny Alyssa, of course, we will survive.  
We live in Parkland I thought, how could this be?  
But sometimes your thoughts are not what you see."  
We run under the table in disbelief.  
I have my friends next to me, what a relief.  
They move to the desk to seek safer shelter.  
But I stayed there, thinking the sound was just bad weather.  
I close my eyes and wait for my teacher to say it's a drill.  
But before I knew it, our door was shot through and I saw his first kill.  
Alaina, Alex, Justin, then Alyssa.  
I'm next and this is not just paranoia.  
He went to the next floor and the next.  
All I could think about is, how many will be left?  
The screams blasting in my ear.  
The blood still won't disappear.  
I scream their names, call for my friends.  
Nothing else to do, they are gone, they are dead..."

- Eden Hebron

***Figure 6. This is a portion of Eden Hebron's poem demonstrating immersion. Hebron wrote this poem to cope with her experiences from the day of the Parkland shooting (De La Rosa, 2018).***

Reporting on Hebron's use of poetry to cope with the Parkland school shooting is an excellent demonstration of immersing the audience into the story. Her poetry allows the audience to

experience deeper emotions and see what the day of the school shooting was like within one of the first classrooms to be attacked.

The sixth of Jenkin's principles is **extractability**. This principle requires extractable elements to be available from the story. Extractable elements allow the reader to take aspects of the story away with them, which they are then able to use in spaces of their everyday life. These takeaways can be physical, but in the context of this study, they were philosophical and behavioral. An example of an article implementing extractability is "Florida high school alumni send moving video to shooting survivors," published by *ABC News*. This article has the extractable element of an inspirational video featuring alumni of MSD High School sending messages of support to the school shooting survivors. The video contains messages such as the following by Stuart Siegel, senior class president of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School's founding class of 1992. Siegel stated, "I just want you to know that thousands of Stoneman Douglas alumni are standing with you. We're so proud of the way that you're handling this unspeakable tragedy" (Kindelan, 2018).



**Figure 7. Screenshot from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Alumni video where they send their messages of support to the school shooting victims (Kindelan, 2018).**

This video is extractable in a philosophical and behavioral sense for all of those who watch it.

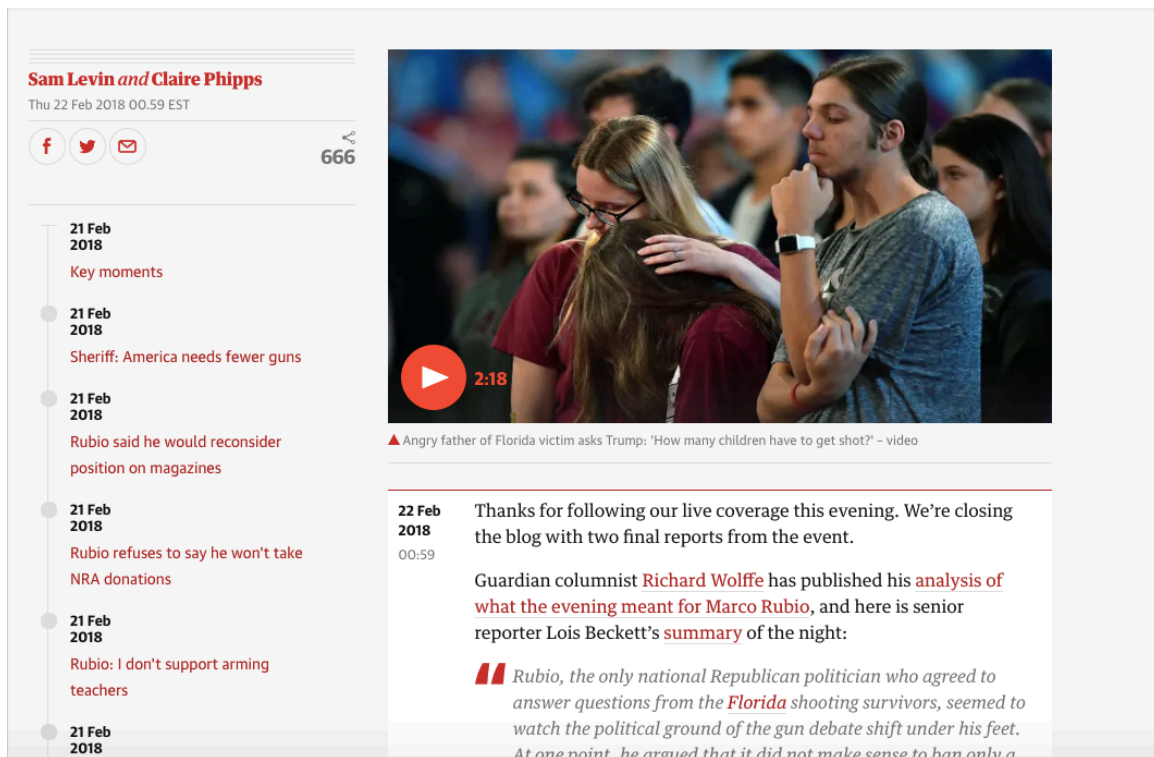
Those who view the video can listen to the alumni speaking out, be inspired to help the victims of the MSD shooting, and in turn try to help make changes to gun laws.

The seventh of Jenkin's principles is **worldbuilding**. Worldbuilding should facilitate the audience's desire to map out and master everything there is to know about the world represented in the story. The storyworld must be able to support diverse characters and multiple stories. In journalism it is not the reporter's job to build the storyworld, but rather to explore facets of the storyworld and bring that to the attention of the readers. The journalist encourages readers to go explore the rest of the storyworld themselves (Moloney, 2011, p. 89). When looking at the MSD shooting articles it is important to consider the Parkland, Florida, community as the characters of a story within the overall storyworld of gun violence in schools. Stories were considered to be worldbuilding stories if they added new information, perspectives, or context to the overall understanding of gun violence in schools. "Three Tallahassee students arrested in one day after school shooting threats," published by the *Tallahassee Democrat*, demonstrates worldbuilding through reporting about school shooting threats outside of the MSD shooting narrative.

"The Leon County Sheriff's Office said 17-year-old Travis Williams, a student at Godby High, was taken into custody Wednesday morning after posting Tuesday night on Instagram: 'I'm going to shoot up amos p godby I swear just wait on 2/23/18.'...Hours later, two more Leon County teenagers were arrested for threatening to start shooting at a local middle school" (Hassanein & Etters, 2018).

This story shows a quick look into how gun violence is still an ongoing issue within schools and contributes to building the greater storyworld by focusing on stories outside of Parkland.

The eighth of Jenkin's principles is **seriality**. Jenkins (2009b) defines a serial as creating meaningful and compelling episodes or chapters, which disperse the full story across multiple segments. But, when it comes to transmedia these episodes are not just dispersed within the same medium, but across multiple types of media. Since only news articles about the MSD shooting were analyzed, stories were considered to have seriality if they were a part of a series of news stories. "Florida survivors confront NRA spokeswoman in heated town hall meeting — as it happened," published by *The Guardian*, is an example of a story fulfilling the principle of seriality. This article is a part of a series of stories by *The Guardian*, which covered the various highlights of the *CNN* town hall meeting with the Parkland survivors. Other stories within the series can be seen on the left-hand side in a visual timeline of the image below.



**Figure 8. Screenshot from the story "Florida survivors confront NRA spokeswoman in heated town hall meeting — as it happened" published by *The Guardian* demonstrating a story that is a part of series (Levin & Phipps, 2018).**

The ninth of Jenkin's principles is **subjectivity**. Subjectivity embraces the individual point of view in storytelling. Different characters add complexity and intrigue through their different views on the same narrative. Subjectivity can allow readers to compare and contrast various subjective experiences of the same events to further expand their own interpretation of the story. When it comes to analyzing the MSD shooting articles, this principle focuses on using multiple personal perspectives to tell a larger story. "Florida shooting: Doctor describes 'sledgehammer' injuries inflicted by AR-15," published by the *Independent*, demonstrates this principle. This article tells the story of the MSD shooting through the eyes of the doctors tasked with treating the victims who were shot and brought to the hospital. Heather Sher describes her perspective on AR-15 rifles after treating the school shooting victims.

"As a radiologist, I have now seen high velocity AR-15 gunshot wounds firsthand, an experience that most radiologists in our country will never have. I pray that these are the last such wounds I have to see, and that AR-15-style weapons and high-capacity magazines are banned for use by civilians in the U.S., once and for all" (Pasha-Robinson, 2018).

The story of the Parkland school shooting then becomes more thoroughly understood through the perspective of secondary characters like Sher.

The tenth, and final, of Jenkin's principles is **performance**. The performance aspect of transmedia storytelling allows individuals to make their own contributions to the narrative. When this principle is implemented, the story will inspire the audience to take action or even provide specific actions for them. Performance can be as vague as leaving questions about the storyline unanswered, which then inspires the readers to create their own additional stories that fit into the storyworld, or it can be as direct as asking the readers to donate five dollars to a charity. This

principle can be seen through the story “He survived the Florida school shooting. He vows not to return to classes until gun laws change,” published by the *Washington Post*. This story features an interview with Alex Wind, a 17-year-old junior at MSD High School who became one of the prominent faces of the Never Again MSD movement. This article calls for the reader to take action. This can be seen in Wind’s response to the last interview question (Lowery, 2018).

**[Wesley Lowery, ABC News reporter]:** To be honest, we’ve heard “never again” before. What would you say to people who are skeptical that anything will change? People sometimes are fatalistic about the prospect of changing gun laws. What do you say to those people?

**Wind:** March 24th. That’s all I have to say to those people. March 24th and the march on Washington. We are going to make a change.

Wind is directly giving the audience a call-to-action. He is telling people to go out and protest or at the very least he is instructing the audience to pay attention to what they’ll be doing on March 24. The storyworld will in turn continue to grow as members of the audience will create their own new stories by attending and even just talking about the march.

After the above definitions for the ten principles were established, the actual content analysis took place. Each collected story was added into a spreadsheet as a row containing columns for the story title, publisher, date and each of the ten transmedia principles. Each story was then read and compared to the list of ten principles and their detailed criteria. If the story was found to have a principle applied to it, then an “X” was placed in the cell for that principle within the row of that specific story. After all of the 108 stories were analyzed using the above coding criteria and logged into the spreadsheet, data for the results was gathered through several count totals. The data within the spreadsheet was examined for count totals to determine the

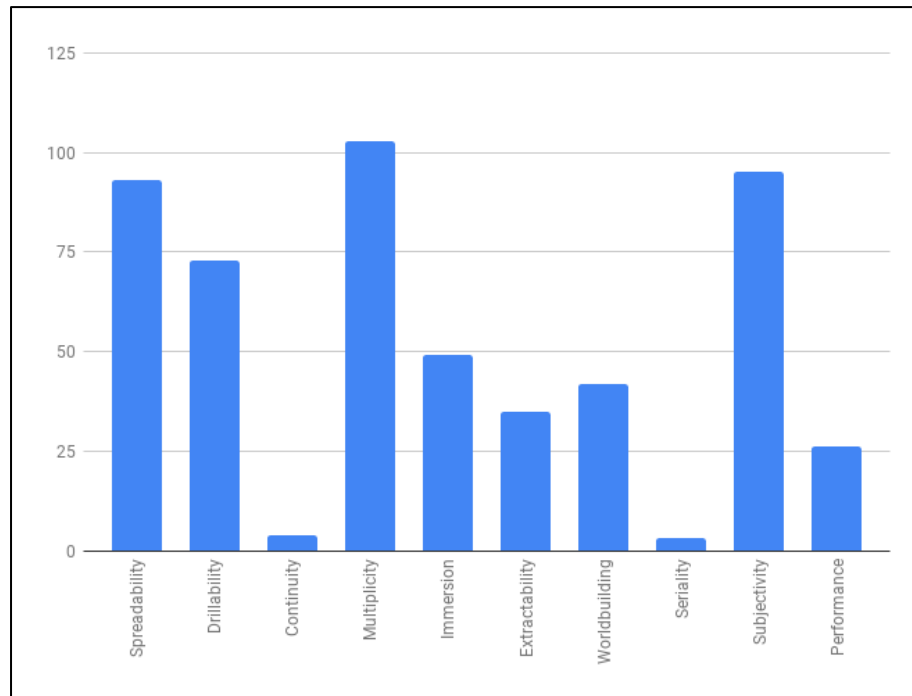
frequency of principles within each story, principles within the entire collection of stories, and sources who published the stories. Further details can be explored in the results section below.



### **Chapter 4: Results**

Results of this study were gathered through a slightly adapted method of a directed qualitative content analysis as described in the previous methods section. The section that follows details results from 108 news articles, which were returned as search results on Google's News section and coded through a list of requirements for meeting Henry Jenkins' ten principles of transmedia storytelling.

Every single one of Jenkins' ten principles of transmedia storytelling appeared at least once among the 108 news stories that were analyzed. The most dominant of Jenkins' principles was multiplicity, which appeared in 103 of the 108 stories making this principle present 95 percent of the time (percentages were rounded up on .5 and over, and down on .4999 and under to the nearest whole number). Following closely behind multiplicity was subjectivity, which appeared in 95 stories, or 88 percent of the time. The third most prevalent principle was spreadability, which was present in 93 stories, or 86 percent of the time. Finally, the fourth most dominant principle was drillability, which was present in 73 stories, or 68 percent of the time. A breakdown of the distribution of the principles within the news stories can be seen in figure 2 below.



***Figure 2. Data gathered from all 108 articles shows the distribution of how frequently each of the 10 transmedia storytelling principles occurred within the news stories the week following the Parkland school shooting.***

The remaining six principles of transmedia storytelling were all present less than 50 percent of the time. Immersion was present 49 times for 45 percent, worldbuilding was present 42 times for 39 percent, extractability was present 35 times for 32 percent, and performance followed with 26 times, or 24 percent. The least dominant principles were continuity and seriality, which were present in less than five percent of the stories. Continuity was present in four and seriality was present in three stories.

There were no stories to which all ten principles applied, but the average was five principles per story. Additionally, there were no stories to which only one principle applied, and there were no stories to which no principles applied. The breakdown can be seen in Table 1 below.

How Many Sources Contained How Many Principles	
Principles	Number of Stories
10 of 10	0
9 of 10	1
8 of 10	1
7 of 10	7
6 of 10	19
5 of 10	38
4 of 10	28
3 of 10	13
2 of 10.	1
1 of 10	0
0 of 10	0

***Table 1. Data shows that the majority of sources contained five or more of Jenkins’ principles of transmedia storytelling.***

The two stories with the highest number of principles were “Florida survivors confront NRA spokeswoman in heated town hall meeting — as it happened,” from *The Guardian*, with nine, and “Florida shooting: Doctor describes 'sledgehammer' injuries inflicted by AR-15,” from *The Independent*, with eight principles.

The results also showed that the 108 news stories were published by 68 unique news sources. The highest number of stories included from one unique source was seven stories, this shows a wide variety of media contributors. The breakdown of the frequency of sources can be found in Table 2 below.

Frequency of publishers in the story set	
Publisher	Number of Stories
South Florida Sun Sentinel	7
Miami Herald	5
CNN	4
The New York Times	4
The New Yorker	4
The Washington Post	4
ABC News	3
Bustle	3
heavy.	3
Tallahassee Democrat	3
Wonkette	3

***Table 2. Data shows that a wide variety of unique sources contributed to the MSD shooting story with less than 10 stories being contributed by each source.***

The variety of story sources on this subject strengthens the transmedia structure of this breaking news event. The more sources from which a reader can draw, the more complex and complete the storyworld becomes when created ad-hoc through the reader's interaction.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This final chapter presents insights and determinations based on data gathered from a content analysis of 108 news stories, which represented a small sampling of the overall MSD shooting coverage and narrative. This research seeks to discover how well Jenkins' principles of transmedia storytelling apply to an important breaking news story, and to provide insights into how changes in the 21st-century mediascape fuels new forms of public engagement and action from high-profile breaking news journalism.

### **Transmedia Principles**

The fact that every single one of Jenkins' ten principles of transmedia storytelling appeared at least once within the set of 108 news stories is enlightening. Additionally, all of the principles were applicable to varying degrees within every single one of the stories. All of the stories had at least a few applicable principles, typically more. This illustrates that the MSD shooting story is a transmedia story.

Jenkin's (2007) stated in his blog, "Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience." If a goal of transmedia storytelling is for the story to be dispersed across multiple delivery channels to create one unified experience, then arguably the readers of journalistic coverage create an equivalent through their consumption of news across platforms. Journalism, however, is non-fiction, and the multiple delivery channels creating the unified experience are the various news sources producing a wide variety of stories covering the newsworthy event from different perspectives.

From examining this journalistic coverage of the MSD shooting events, I argue that a transmedia inception takes place in breaking news coverage of events with intense public

interest. So many unique news sources contributing to telling the MSD shooting story seeds the MSD shooting being a transmedia story itself. It is a transmedia storyworld within the larger storyworld of gun violence in schools.

### **Feral Transmedia**

I argue on the basis of the data collected that the MSD shooting is a transmedia story, albeit an atypical one. As previously mentioned in the literature review, there are three main types of transmedia stories: intracompositional or franchise, portmanteau, and the complex transmedia experience, which is a hybrid of the first two types (Gambarato, 2013, Pratten, 2011/2015). These all refer to types of entertainment transmedia stories, but the MSD shooting does not fall under the entertainment category. The MSD shooting narrative is what Moloney (2013) refers to as a “feral” transmedia story. Unlike earlier work in transmedia storytelling, feral transmedia stories are not initially meant to be transmediated. For example, take this interaction with a breaking news story that Moloney describes on his research blog:

Here in Colorado last month we suffered massive and destructive flooding. The story is still unfolding and the aftermath will endure for months more. When the news struck that local mountain streams would surpass 100-year flood levels, I, my friends and colleagues dove headlong into a diverse array of media forms and channels to digest the news. I turned on the local TV broadcasts, I listened actively to local public radio, I watched Twitter hashtags, Facebook posts, Instagram feeds, awaited SMS texts from the university and picked up the phone to talk to friends and relatives.

I didn't get the story from one place — multiple devices and technologies of all ages were used. I didn't get it in any one media form — the story came as text, video, audio, conversation and even in the clouds outside my window. I absorbed complete stories

from multiple sources and sewed them into a larger and more complex picture of what was happening than I could of had I depended on only one of them (Moloney, 2013, para. 2–3).

The above news story was not only a breaking story but also a feral transmedia story. They are not organized from the beginning with someone planning the milestones and unexpected surprises of the narrative. Instead they develop from everyday life spontaneously and then turn into a transmedia narrative. Moloney adds, “Once engaged with a story that demands fast attention, we immerse ourselves in multiple spaces in the mediascape — online and off — to gather the complete and current picture” (para. 4) The public is intensely interested when quickly moving events bring up cultural, civil or environmental issues. This then fuels the drive to know more and stay up to date. These interactions with a breaking news story naturally lead into the transmedial consumption of news by the audience (Moloney, 2013).

### **Transmedia Journalism**

From simply examining one week of breaking news stories and finding all of Jenkins’ principles were applicable to varying degrees changes how we look at transmedia storytelling and journalism. All of Jenkins’ ten principles of transmedia have been individually found in a journalism context before, they are just not typically analyzed together as a single storyline as in this study. Absolutely nothing new is needed to apply transmedia storytelling to journalism, it is simply changing how journalism is approached. Looking at journalism from of a transmedia point of view can change the role of breaking news coverage.

Media convergence is no longer a new phenomenon, but rather it is a daily reality in 2019. In this age of convergence, journalism has to work for the audience’s attention as it competes against entertainment, social media, and the thousands of other messages the audience

is flooded with on a daily basis. There is power in implementing Jenkins' principles of transmedia storytelling into the forethought of covering important stories as it can truly get the audience to pay attention and interact with important stories, even breaking news stories. When transmedia principles are implemented into journalism it increases journalism's ability to propel an important story forward into a conscious transmedia story. Then if that transmedia story of injustice or catastrophe gains enough audience attention it might even turn into a movement.

### **Never Again MSD Movement**

The initial coverage of the MSD shooting evolved from a singular storyline into a feral transmedia story within the wider storyworld of gun violence in schools. Without diverse news coverage published across the mediascape, I argue, the Never Again MSD movement wouldn't have been able to come to life so quickly. The presence of Jenkins' principles might have had a hand in fueling this transition from a single news event to a movement. Spreadability allowed the stories to flood through the internet and inform the audience, while immersion intensified their interactions with the content. Then after being deeply immersed in the content, principles like extractability and performance may have inspired members of the audience to take actions and further the Never Again MSD movement. I argue that the movement would never have been possible without getting the audience to listen, and that is exactly the role the transmedia nature of the journalism fulfilled. Those early breaking news stories, supported by various combinations of Jenkins' ten principles of transmedia storytelling, were able to get the audience's attention, keep their attention, and inspire them to make their own contributions to the storyworld. This is why the four most dominant principles from this study's analysis were multiplicity, subjectivity, spreadability, and drillability. These principles help gain the audience's attention, keep it, and inspire the audience to seek out and share knowledge. This coverage also broadcast the actions



and efforts of the key characters of the MSD shooting storyline. When transmedia storytelling and journalism are leveraged together this can open new doors for transmedia activism. While it is not the role of journalists to play a part in creating movements, as they're intended to report objectively, transmedia reporting can create, intentionally or not, a smooth and linear transition into activism.

This feral transmedia story continues to grow long after the shooting. The key characters in the MSD shooting story have released multiple books, been featured on the cover of *TIME* magazine, managed a website and email newsletters, gained support from celebrities, held more protests and political discussions, and even traveled across the U.S. for their The Road to Change bus tour in efforts to get people to vote in the upcoming 2020 election (Hampson, 2018). Their story has continued to inspire new transmedia stories and make news headlines throughout 2019.

### **Limitations**

An early goal of this thesis was to conduct interviews with the Parkland students, specifically any of them who were directly involved with the development of the Never Again MSD movement, in order to better understand the connection between the journalistic reporting and the development of their activist movement. These interviews would not have been focused on the shooting itself, but rather about their communication strategy. Contact was made with their March for our Lives campaign manager, but unfortunately, further contact was still denied. Contacting the students themselves through social media resulted in no responses.

### **Future Research**

The method of this study is easily scalable and could be used to analyze the MSD shooting narrative on a much larger scale beyond just analyzing news stories. Future studies could widen their scope to analyze news stories, social media posts, and even live events. In light

of the transmedia nature of coverage of the MSD shooting, future work could explore whether there is any connection between the relationships between Jenkin's principles and the spreadability or virality of a storyworld. Future studies could also aim to pinpoint and examine the specific moments the Parkland school shooting took a turn from a singular event into a political movement. New studies could then explore how Jenkins' principles fuel the activist movement that sprang from the shooting, and discover if all of the principles go beyond fueling basic engagement with the stories to spawn activism in general? Additional areas of research that are intriguing, but remain unanswered through this study, include: What exactly made the Parkland school shooting different than the hundreds of other shootings that take place each year, why didn't the Parkland students' story follow the traditional pattern of anger, sadness, and grief with a few calls for gun control just to be silenced until the next tragedy, why hasn't their presence in the media faded like the other social media driven campaigns? If these questions could be answered it would be extremely valuable for building future campaigns and leading to a possible new framework for how transmedia storytelling could be used for activism.

## **Conclusions**

The MSD shooting narrative is in fact a feral transmedia story, and it is still gaining momentum. Thinking about important news stories as transmedia stories changes the way we understand journalism and transmedia storytelling. Jenkins' ten principles of transmedia storytelling provide a framework for discussing transmedia storytelling as a journalism tool, and when these principles are acknowledged in journalism, they can have meaningful influences on important societal issues.

Breaking news journalism requires fast action by journalists that rarely affords the time for planning how the coverage will fit into or become a transmedia storyworld. However, the

first step in making that possible is understanding what influence these principles have on the reception of the stories. For activists, embracing the role of journalism's transmedia nature can lead to faster and more effective social action campaigns.

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